

## **Social Representations of History in the Global South: Remembering the colonial past from the margins**

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### **Abstract**

In this chapter, we discuss two studies that aimed to analyse social representations of world history and national history (Study 1) and supranational history (Study 2). Study 1 was conducted among university students in six former Portuguese colonies (Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique) and Study 2 was conducted among university students in Latin America (Brazil, Chile, and Mexico). In both studies we used questionnaires with open-ended questions about important events in world history and in national history (Study 1: 862 participants, average age 24 years old, through a face to face questionnaire) or in the region's history (Study 2: 213 participants, average age 25 years old, through an online questionnaire). Despite the reference to different historical events and the existence of national and regional specificities, several common trends were noteworthy across the studies. There was a centrality of events involving political issues, conflicts and revolutions, as well as a recency effect and a sociocentric bias, replicating previous research about social representations of world history in different countries. There was also a prominence of events regarding colonization and independence issues in all samples, however this prominence was stronger concerning national or supranational history than concerning world history. The colonial liberation narrative was predominant in the data from African countries (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique), emphasizing the violence of colonization period and the successful struggle against it. Among Latin American participants, through an emphasis on a common narrative of struggle and overcoming difficulties, the participants shared social representations of Latin American history that may favour mobilization and resistance, challenging the stability and legitimacy of the existing social order. These findings are discussed in terms of their

potential connections with present-day intergroup relations within and between world regions.

**Keywords:** Social Representations of History. Colonial past. Global South. Africa. Latin America.

## 1. Introduction

According to Saint-Laurent and colleagues (2017), “the past has never been as relevant to the present as it is in the post-truth world of today” (p. 147). In his turn, Martins (2017) argues that although the questions of history and order were important at all times, “nowadays [they] are particularly acute” (p. 11). In fact, it is nowadays crucial to understand how people relate to history and to understand the public (mediatic) uses of the past and their relation to identity dynamics (e.g., Cabecinhas & Abadia, 2013; Erll, 2011). The recent boost of social media, the intensification and diversification of migration flows, and the increasing world interconnectivity make this area of study particularly challenging. However, this “new” world in which we live has not resulted (yet) in the eradication of “old” social asymmetries, rather on the contrary; the digitised “global economy” in which we live is accompanied by an increasing concentration of resources (economic and symbolic) in fewer and fewer people, and a greater radicalisation of social inequalities, that mainly affect the Global South<sup>40</sup>. Thus, the social and technological transformation has been accompanied by the maintenance, and even exacerbation, of old dichotomies and “gaps” (digital and other), which continue to shape our lives in a very powerful, yet often subtle way (e.g., Cabecinhas & Cunha, 2017).

Memory is not just the objective recall of events or the plain storage of a fixed past. It is a selective process of permanent interpretation and reconstruction, which includes remembrance and forgetfulness (Bartlett, 1923, 1932/1995; Halbwachs, 1925/1994; 1950/1968). Collective memory has been a privileged arena of symbolic struggle among groups, owing to their potential to legitimize current and future

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<sup>40</sup> In recent years, the expression “Global South” is becoming widely used for referring to some regions/countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, in place of phrases such as “Third World” and “Developing Countries”. Therefore, as stated by Dados and Connel (2012), “[t]he use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power” (p. 12).

agendas. Memory is a vital anchor of identity processes – an anchor that is not static and fixed, but rather malleable and fluid, with entangled threads and “blind spots.”

Although interest in identity narratives and social memory has grown considerably over the past few decades, these have been studied in very fragmented ways. In this chapter, we connect contributions from different disciplines, to emphasise the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue in the study of social memory. In addition, our contribution aims to challenge the Eurocentric paradigm that still prevails in this area of studies, as in others.

### **1.1. Collective memory and power asymmetries**

In our view, as previously stated, all memory is social, since no individual “is an island” (Tajfel, 1982) and personal memory does not exist in a cultural “void.” Erll (2011) states that memories are “small islands in a sea of forgetfulness” since “forgetting is the rule and remembrance is the exception” (p. 7). As noted by several authors (e.g., Cabecinhas, Lima, & Chaves, 2006), “forgetfulness”, especially in the scope of the public sphere, does not operate randomly or innocuously, resulting from conscious or unconscious selection and filtering processes that substantially reduce the spectrum of possible memories.

Rothberg (2009) emphasized the need to enable a “multidirectional” public memory that articulates different past experiences from a “non-competitive” perspective, i.e., that does not consider the different memories in a given public space from a logic of competition between groups. However, it is important to bear in mind that remembrance and forgetfulness are forged in the dialectical relationship with the prevailing social and political order. All communities have “memory policies,” that is, mechanisms through which historical milestones (charters) are selected and incorporated into narratives.

By taking these claims into account, we assume that social memory is both a process and a product of the creative activity of people and groups, in constant (re)construction, influencing and being influenced by the life paths and experiences of the present. Thus, the concept of social memory is closely related to two other fundamental concepts: social identities (Tajfel, 1974, 1981) and social representations (Moscovici, 1961/2004, 1988). However, the articulation between these concepts cannot be established in a social void and without considering the multiple and persisting power asymmetries that mark people’s lives and their life paths, as well as their daily

interpersonal and intergroup interactions (Amâncio, 2017; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2002). Therefore, it is our understanding that the social memory dynamics can only be understood in their interconnection with identity processes, social representations and the surrounding social and cultural context. This necessarily involves the methodological triangulation and the articulation of analytical levels (Cabecinhas, 2009; Doise, 1982; Martins, 2009).

Several authors have emphasized the identity functions of social memory: the definition of the group identity of belonging, in comparison with outgroups that are considered to be relevant; the construction or maintenance of the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup, through the selection of what is recalled or forgotten; the justification of past, present or future actions of the ingroup; the legitimation of the current social order or the mobilization for collective action aiming at social change (e.g., Cabecinhas et al., 2006; Licata & Klein, 2005). Thus, how each social group (re)interprets its past impacts their daily actions and experiences, their visions of the present and the definition of agendas for the future (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Licata and Klein (2005) consider collective memory as “a shared set of representations of the past based on a common identity to a group” (p. 243). This definition takes as synonyms the terms “collective memory” and “social representations of history” (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

In recent years several studies have been undertaken on the social representations of world history using similar methodologies in several countries, enabling comparative analyses (e.g., Liu et al., 2005, 2009; Pennebaker et al., 2006). A set of systematic tendencies have been observed in studies on social representations of world history: a) *centrality of war and conflict*—a tendency to consider events related to war, terrorism, conflicts and revolutions among the most important in world history, to the detriment of other types of events, such as those related to socioeconomic issues or to scientific and technological achievements; b) *recency effect*—tendency to remember the most recent events (especially those involving the last three or four generations), to the detriment of the earlier ones; c) *sociocentrism*—tendency to consider the events that have taken place in their own country, or that directly involved their country, amongst the most important for world history, thus overestimating their nation’s role in world history (Zaromb et al., 2018); d) *Eurocentrism*<sup>41</sup>—tendency to consider as more

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<sup>41</sup> “Eurocentrism” is used here as a synonym for “Westerncentrism”: a world view that places Western countries, namely Europe and the USA, at the centre of the world (Liu et al., 2009).

important the events that have taken place in Europe or the United States of America (USA), thereby reproducing current power relations in the world order (Liu et al., 2005, 2009); e) *nostalgic* effect - tendency to consider the earlier events as more positive than the most recent ones (Cf. Martins, 2006; Páez, Bobowik, De Guissmé, Liu, & Licata, 2016; Taylor, 1991).

These “systematic tendencies” were observed in a series of studies on social representations of world history undertaken among university students in several countries (for a recent review, see Hilton & Liu, 2017). Can the same pattern be observed regarding representations of national and supranational history? Although several studies have been conducted in this field in different countries, there is still a lack of research on this topic in African countries and of research on collective memories of supranational groups (such as Latin America). Furthermore, in countries that went through long periods of exploitation during their colonial processes – such as in Africa and Latin America –, this might influence how individuals interpret and (re)construct the memories of past events that are relevant to their group’s history. Therefore, in this chapter we discuss two studies conducted in order to fill these gaps: Study 1 – that aimed to analyse social representations of world and national history in six Portuguese-speaking countries (in Africa, Asia and Latin America); Study 2 – that aimed to analyse social representations of Latin American history in three countries of the region (Brazil, Chile, and Mexico).

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Study 1**

A series of studies on social representations of history – world and national – was conducted in Portuguese-speaking countries. From an empirical point of view, a methodological triangulation was applied, which included surveys, interviews, focus groups and the analysis of discourses in the Lusophone cyberspace (e.g., Macedo, Martins, Cabecinhas, & Macedo, 2013). The same data collection and processing procedures were used across the different countries to enable comparative analyses. In this chapter we shall focus only on the results obtained by the survey, but occasionally we will use the data collected through the other methodologies for contextualization purposes.

Data collection by survey (a face to face questionnaire) took place in six countries in different continents: Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique

(Africa), Brazil (South America) and East Timor (Asia). In total, 862 university students participated in this study: 184 Angolans (81 women and 103 men); 105 Brazilians (78 women and 27 men); 121 Cape Verdeans (57 women and 64 men); 98 Timorese (46 women and 52 men); 174 Guineans (43 women and 131 men); 180 Mozambicans (99 women and 81 men); average age 24 years old. The fact that the samples are made up exclusively of university students owes, on the one hand, to issues of feasibility – so that the survey could be conducted appropriately – and, on the other hand, to issues of comparability with previous studies conducted in other cultural contexts.

The students were invited to take part in an international study on history. They were told that what we were interested in was their personal opinion and not their level of knowledge. In the first part of the survey, participants were asked to list the most important events in the world history of the last one thousand years, following an adaptation of the methodology developed by Liu and colleagues (2005). Once the list was completed, participants were asked to assess the impact (positive or negative) of each event and then to indicate the emotions associated with each event. Mention of events and emotions was entirely unconstrained (no previous list was given to participants so as not to condition their responses). The impact level was measured against a closed scale (1 = very negative; 7 = very positive). Subsequently, an identical procedure was followed to obtain mentions of the events of the national history of the respective countries (without any time frame). The surveys conducted in the different countries had the same basic structure and were drafted in Portuguese; minor adjustments were made to contents and language, in accordance with the respective country.

Data processing was performed using the protocols established in previous research (Liu et al., 2005). According to these protocols, the events and people that were initially mentioned by the participants were grouped, taking into consideration their recurrence. We kept the names that were most used by the participants to refer to the events and people. Then, they were also coded according to “when,” “where” and “how” they were alluded to by adapting the codes used in the abovementioned studies. After conducting the coding, data were processed with the *SPSS* software, in order to perform descriptive statistics calculations concerning the events and the impact attributed to them.

## 2.2. Study 2

Data collection in this study was conducted from the second half of 2015 until the beginning of 2016 via an online questionnaire, which contained open-ended questions about important events and people in Latin American history, following the same protocols explained regarding Study 1. The sample consisted of 213 young undergraduate and graduate students (137 women and 76 men; average age 25 years old) from three Latin American countries: 112 Brazilians, 47 Chileans and 54 Mexicans. The online survey was administered in the standard language of higher education in the respective countries (Portuguese in Brazil, and Spanish in Chile and in Mexico), and was adapted to each of the three countries according to specific questions involving the countries' names. The instrument also contained other open-ended questions about participants' perceptions regarding Latin America in general, and questions about the reasons for their responses. These questions are not analysed in this chapter, although the answers given served as a source of contextualization for our understanding of participants' answers, and further substantiated our analyses.

Data processing and analysis was performed using the same protocols described in the previous study.

Regarding both studies it is noteworthy that when we deal with national groups, it is necessary to bear in mind that each group is heterogeneous, composed by a great diversity of individuals, with different life paths and experiences, who in turn belong to groups with different positions in the social structure. In this sense, we do not intend to generalize the results of these studies to the population of the respective countries and/or regions, but only to explore the impact of social belonging on the social representations of history.

In this text, our focus will be on discussing the results related to the free mention of *events* in world, national and supranational history.

## 3. Results

The results obtained on the "Top 10" events regarding the Study 1 were previously presented in the following work: Cabecinhas, 2006, 2015; Cabecinhas & Évora, 2008; Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010, 2013; Cabecinhas & Nhaga, 2008; Cabecinhas et al., 2006; Feijó & Cabecinhas, 2009; Mendes, Silva, & Cabecinhas, 2010. Whereas the results concerning the Study 2 were previously presented in: Brasil (2017); Brasil & Cabecinhas (2017).

In this section we revisit the data related to the spontaneous mention to events regarding world history and national history (Study 1) and supranational history (Study 2), more specifically, the “Top 10” events of each social representation that was investigated. We will present the data of each study separately, followed by a general discussion. Within each study, the results obtained in the different countries will be discussed simultaneously in order to enable a comparative analysis. Our focus is on the events that relate to the history that “binds” these countries, that is, a history that “begins” with the period of the “discoveries”.

### 3.1. Study 1

The results obtained in the six Portuguese-speaking countries confirmed the main patterns observed in the studies on social representations of world history in other cultural contexts (e.g., Liu et al., 2005, 2009; Pennebaker et al., 2006), namely:

(a) *centrality of war and conflict*– World War II and World War I were the most frequently named events; notable mention was also made to more recent armed conflicts (such as the Iraq War) and terrorist attacks (for example, 9/11). A strong emphasis was also put on events related to colonization and independence, as will be discussed later.

b) *recency effect*– globally, participants mentioned more recent events (with an emphasis on events taking place over the last one hundred years), to the detriment of earlier ones. In most cases, the events mentioned were related to the media agenda at the time of data collection, which served as an “anchor” to think about history.

c) *Eurocentrism* or *Westercentrism*– the events related to Europe and North America (especially the USA) and the “global” events that are given a central role to the Western nations were salient in the data collected in the different countries, although that salience was more prominent in the data from Brazil, partially reproducing a vision of world history that is disseminated in the “global” media, in which the key events are played mainly by Western countries.

d) *sociocentrism*– in all countries there was a tendency to consider the events that took place in their own country (or that involved them directly) among the most important for world history. Thus, although the existence of hegemonic representations of the world history is undeniable, the influence of the positioning of national groups in that history is also evident. We therefore found in these studies that each group tends to allocate high relevance to their own history in the context of world history.



Therefore, participants emphasised national events as important for world history, thus placing their own country on the “world map”. That is the case, for example, of the Timorese participants, who mentioned the “Santa Cruz massacre”, the “independence of East Timor” and the “Indonesian invasion” of the territory amongst the ten most important events in world history. In the case of the Mozambican sample, the observed pattern of results is further linked to a pan-African than to a nationalist agenda, with participants foregrounding events related to the “common destiny” of the African peoples and their struggle for the liberation of the colonial yoke and conquest of independence.

In addition to these systematic trends observed in the results, the contents related to the colonization and independence processes of those countries were also foregrounded, with an emphasis on elements related to human rights. For Brazilian participants, the “abolition of slavery” was among the most important events of world history (evoked by 11.4% of participants). It is also worth mentioning that reference to issues related to human rights and the promotion of equality (“end of *Apartheid*”, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, etc.) were more frequently evoked by African participants than in previous studies conducted in other regions of the world (e.g. Liu et al., 2009). The Mozambican participants highlighted the “independence of Africa” as one of the most positive events in world history (28%), associating it with positive emotions (pride, joy, happiness). The fact that the Mozambican participants have mentioned African independences and not specifically the independence of Mozambique (pointed out by 3% of the participants) points out to a pan-African agenda, as we mentioned earlier. This highlights the common struggle of the African peoples against European imperialism. “Colonialism” (19%) was perceived as negative by Mozambican participants, as was the “Berlin Conference 1884/5” (12%), when European countries divided Africa among themselves, defining arbitrary borders according to their own strategic interests.

As far as the representations of national history are concerned, a set of matches was also observed in the pattern of results obtained in the six countries. Events that marked national independence have taken on a prominent role in all countries. National independence was the most cited event by Angolan participants (“independence of Angola”, 85.7%), Cape Verdeans (“independence of Cape Verde”, 83.5%) and Mozambicans (“national independence”, 81.7%). Hence it was considered one of the most positive events in the nation’s history, to which positive emotions have been

consensually associated, among which pride and joy stand out. In its turn, the “declaration of independence of Guinea” was the third event most cited by Guinean participants (44.3%), and “civil war” was the most cited event (86.2%).

The Brazilian participants highlighted especially the “military dictatorship” (72.4%), the “abolition of slavery” (45.7%) and the “independence of Brazil” (41%). The Timorese participants cited the [restoration of] independence of East Timor<sup>42</sup>, on May 20, 2002 (45.8%), and the events that preceded it: the 1999 referendum (43.8%) and the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1996 (14.6%), awarded to Ximenes Belo and Ramos Horta. Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor, in 1975 (31.3%), and the various massacres that occurred in the territory during the Indonesian occupation were the events considered to be most negative in the country’s history. The Santa Cruz massacre (November 12, 1991)<sup>43</sup> was the most cited event by the respondents (78.1%). Although this was one of the most dramatic events in the history of East Timor, some respondents allocated a positive impact to it, precisely because it is seen as the event that awakened the international awareness and triggered a series of campaigns in favour of self-determination of the Timorese – which paved the way to the referendum that led to the Independence of East Timor.

Events related to discoveries, colonialism and decolonization process played an important role in the mentions of participants from those countries. The “discovery of Brazil” was the 7th event most cited by the Brazilian participants (27.6%) in the context of national history. Some Brazilians mentioned the “arrival of the Portuguese” (7.6%); however, such naming refers more to the time of arrival of Portuguese settlers than to the discovery itself. The “coming of the Portuguese royal family” to Brazil was cited by 8.6% of the Brazilians, and “Portuguese colonization” by 5.7%.

The “colonization of Angola” was cited by 7.14% of the Angolan participants and the “arrival of the Portuguese” (in 1482) was mentioned by 6.04%. In both cases, the Angolan participants reported ambivalent emotions: those who cited the “Portuguese colonization” or the “Portuguese occupation” reported mainly negative

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<sup>42</sup> Most Timorese simply cited the date of the event, “May 20, 2002”, others cited the “Independence of East Timor 2002”, and others cited the “Restoration of Independence 2002”. The proclamation of independence of East Timor took place on November 28, 1975 by FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor). However, a few days later the territory was occupied by the Indonesian forces. The independence would only be restored on May 20, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> The video-recordings of the massacre, in which some 300 East Timorese lost their lives, were broadcast all over the world, giving rise to the largest campaign to condemn the genocide against the people of East Timor. For an analysis of the media agenda of the Timorese cause, see, e.g., Marques (2005).

emotions, while those who mentioned the “arrival of the Portuguese” reported mostly positive emotions. In turn, the Cape Verdean participants highlighted the “discovery of Cape Verde” (46.3%), the “decolonization” (14.9%), the “Cape Verde settlement” (11.6%) and the “Colonization of Cape Verde” (9.9%); the latter was evaluated negatively, in contrast to “discovery” and “settlement”. The “colonization” was also cited by 28.3% of the Mozambican participants and by 4% of the Guinean participants, and is in both cases evaluated negatively (in both contexts the reference to the “arrival” of the Portuguese was minor).

The memories of the colonial violence were especially salient to the Angolan participants, who particularly emphasized slavery, the slave trade and the massacres. The “armed struggle for national liberation” and the “achievement of independence” were the most emphasised events, besides the end of the civil war, when the peace agreements were signed in 2002 (Mendes et al., 2010). The “armed struggle for national liberation” was the third event most cited by the Angolan participants (60.44%). Similarly to Guinea-Bissau (Cabecinhas & Nhaga, 2008) and Mozambique (Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010), young Angolans considered the “armed struggle for national liberation” a positive event. The emotions reported in relation to this event were ambivalent, although positive emotions prevailed: pride and joy, because it resulted in national independence, but also anger and sadness, for originating the loss of many lives.

The Guinean participants highlighted the Pindjiguiti massacre, which took place on August 3, 1959, as one of the most important events in national history (30.5%, fifth most cited event), and it was negatively evaluated. On that day a group of sailors and workers from the port of Pindjiguiti decided to go on strike for better working conditions and salaries. Portuguese settlers responded with guns, killing dozens of workers who did not have the same kind of weapons to fight back. Documents written by Amílcar Cabral, as Secretary General of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), refer to this event as crucial in the decision to initiate the armed struggle against colonialism (Cabral, 1966).

The massacres that took place during the colonial period in Mozambique were also recalled by Mozambican participants, although they did not figure among the top ten events cited. For example, the Mueda massacre was cited by 8.3% of Mozambican participants (see, e.g., Pereira & Cabecinhas, 2016; Schefer, 2016, for discussions about how this massacre was portrayed in the Mozambican cinema).

The Timorese participants referred to the “Portuguese colonization” (11.5%) as one of the most important events in national history. Some participants specifically mentioned the “evangelization of East Timor” and the “arrival of the Portuguese missionaries” (5.2%). Although the Timorese negatively evaluated the “Portuguese colonization”, they evaluated the “arrival of the Portuguese missionaries” and the “Portuguese evangelization” very positively. Thus, the Portuguese presence in the territory was clearly ambivalent, depending on the “anchor” that is enabled in the particular context: the “overexploitation of natural resources” was negatively evaluated, but the “evangelization” was positively evaluated (Cabecinhas, 2006; see Marques, 2005, for a discussion on the role of Catholic church in the liberation process from Indonesia invasion).

Specifically, with regard to slavery, “an unavoidable theme in the history of Africa [and of Latin American countries like Brazil]”, due to its “length, breadth and harmful effects” (Mendes et al., 2010, p. 212), the following results were observed. The “abolition of slavery” was the second event most cited by the Brazilian participants (45.7%) in the context of the history of Brazil. “Slavery” was reported by 7.4% of the Cape Verdean participants, and is considered the most negative event in the history of the country. In the context of the history of Guinea-Bissau, the “slave trade” was reported by only one participant and no other reference to the problem of slavery was made. However, it is worth noting that this problem was extremely salient in the responses of those participants to the questions asked about world history, with most Guinean participants highlighting “slavery”, “slave trade” and “abolition of slavery” (Cabecinhas & Nhaga, 2008). The “abolition of slavery” was also cited in Cape Verde, especially in the context of world history (18.2%, fifth most cited event in history), more than in the context of national history (Cabecinhas & Évora, 2008).

The Mozambican participants cited the “slave trade” (11%) as the most negative event in the history of Mozambique. Reference was also made to the compulsory labour regime. The introduction, in Mozambique, of the status of the indigenous and of a compulsory labour regime were mainly cited in the context of group discussion (Cf. Feijó & Cabecinhas, 2009). The “abolition of slavery” was the seventh event most cited by Angolan participants (17.03%), whereas “slave trade” was the ninth most cited event (10.44%). Conversely, data collected in a previous study in Portugal showed that a large proportion of the Portuguese participants cited the “Portuguese discoveries” as one of the great events of world history, while mention to the “abolition of slavery” is scarce in

the context of world history and inexistent in the context of national history (Cabecinhas et al., 2006).

### 3.2. Study 2

The results referring to the collective memories regarding Latin American history also corroborated previous studies (e.g., Liu et al., 2005, 2009; Pennebaker et al., 2006) on social representation of world history. More concretely, there was a:

(1) *recency effect* – a prominence of events from the twentieth century, with the exception of events such as the region's "conquest", "colonization" and "independence". Moreover, there were very few references to events prior to the "discovery" of America, therefore, those were not amongst the ten most important events in the region's history.

(2) *sociocentric bias* – despite the prominence of events referring to Latin America in general (such as "colonization", "independences", "dictatorships"), there was a sociocentric bias in the three samples, i.e., students tended to consider events that took place in their own country, or that involved them directly, among the most important in Latin American history. For example, Brazilian participants mentioned the "Paraguayan War" (1864-1870) – an armed conflict that involved Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay – as the third most important event (33.9%) in the history of Latin America, with a negative perceived impact; and the "MERCOSUR" (17%), with a "neutral" (near the mid-point of the scale) impact, as the seventh most relevant event. Whereas the Chilean participants cited the "Chilean dictatorship" (12.8%) and "Allende's government" (10.6%) among the most important events in Latin American history, the first with an extremely negative evaluation and the last with a positive evaluation. As for the Mexican participants, they cited "NAFTA" agreement (14.8%), "loss of Texas/USA–Mexican War" (11.1%) and "independence of Mexico" (11.1%)<sup>44</sup> among the most important events in the region's history, the first two with negative perceived impacts, and the last with a positive impact.

(3) *centrality of events related to wars and conflicts and political events other than wars* – several events cited referred to conflicts such as "revolutions", and to political events other than wars, including references to government regimes, such as "dictatorships" or "democracies". Still, in this study, the overall percentage of these two

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<sup>44</sup> For Chile and Mexico, more than ten events were listed, since different events were mentioned in equal frequency.

categories of events combined for the three samples (40.7%) was lower than what was found in previous studies (e.g., Liu et al, 2005). This is probably due to the distribution of events in other categories, particularly in the two concerning *discoveries, exploration and colonization* and *independences*, which together accounted for an average of 32.3% of all the events mentioned. This pattern of results was similar to the one found in African countries, as we will discuss later.

Focusing on the “Top 10” in the three samples, there were five common events among the ten most frequently evoked events by participants in this study: “independences”, “dictatorships”, “Cuban Revolution”, “colonization”, and “discovery”.

“Independences” was the most frequently mentioned event by the three samples (Mexico = 61.1%; Chile = 59.6%; Brazil = 46.4%), with positive perceived impact, whereas “colonization” was negatively assessed and was the fifth most cited event by Mexicans (20.4%), Brazilians (19.6%) and Chileans (17%). “Dictatorships” was considered the second most important event by Chilean (44.7%) and Brazilian (33.9%) students, and the fourth by Mexican students (24.1%), all with negative evaluations. As for the “Cuban Revolution”, it was positively evaluated in all countries and it was the third most mentioned event by Chilean (42.6%) and Mexican (25.9%) participants, and the fourth by the Brazilian ones (32.1%).

Regarding the “discovery” of Latin American countries, we found more controversy in our results. Different expressions were used by the participants to refer to this event; some named it discovery, others conquest or invasion. These different ways of naming the same event seemed to convey a different positioning of the individuals and different interpretations regarding the impact of this event. Those who used the term “discovery” tended to evaluate its impact as more positively than those who used the term “conquest”. For this reason, we chose to separate these constructs in order to encourage discussions about representations of the “discoveries,” which are fundamental to the construction of Latin American history and the identity dynamics of those who belong to this region. Thus, on the one hand, “discovery” (Chile = 14.9%; Mexico = 14.8%; Brazil = 14.3%) received a positive evaluation in the Chilean and the Brazilian samples, and an almost “neutral” among the Mexican students. While, on the other hand, “conquest” (Mexico = 33.3%;

Chile = 25.5%) received a negative evaluation, mainly by the Chilean participants, and was not, however, one of the most cited events in the Brazilian sample.

Besides “conquest”, two other events were also only mentioned among the Chilean and the Mexican “Top 10”: “revolutions”, in general, and “Mexican Revolution”, both positively evaluated. The first, was cited by 18.5% of Mexican and 10.6% of Chilean students; and the second, was mentioned by 16.7% and 12.8% of Mexican and Chilean participants, respectively.

Regarding the specificities in each country, the events nominated only in the Brazilian “Top 10” were: “Paraguayan War” (33.9%), “Treaty of Tordesillas” (19.6%), “MERCOSUR” (17%), “end of dictatorships” (9.7%), and “democracies” (8%). Apart from the “Paraguayan War”, these events were positively evaluated, however, the event “democracies” received an almost “neutral” evaluation, which will be discussed later. The events named only in the Chilean “Top 10” were: “coup d’états” (17%), “Chilean dictatorship” (12.8%), “extermination of native/indigenous peoples” (10.6%), “neoliberalism” (10.6%) and “Salvador Allende's government” (10.6%). This last event had a positive evaluation and the other four had negative evaluations regarding their impact on Latin American history – in particular, the “extermination of native/indigenous peoples”. Lastly, the events named only in the Mexican “Top 10” were, as previously mentioned: “independence of Mexico” (11.1%), “NAFTA” agreement (14.8%), and the “loss of Texas/USA–Mexican War” (11.1%), all of which were negatively evaluated.

#### 4. Discussion

As previously stated, the results of both studies replicate those of previous research about social representations of world history in different countries (e.g., Liu et al., 2005, 2009; Pennebaker et al., 2006). In summary, there was a focus on the recent past of the national and supranational history, with the exception of events such as the European “arrival” or “discovery” of their own country, which had some notoriety among the Brazilian and Cape Verdeans participants (Study 1). This recency effect might be related to the fact that the history of Africa and Latin America before the European presence had long been absent in textbooks used in African and Latin American countries, and the fact that only later were they recovered by the historiographies of these countries.

With respect to the sociocentric bias, particularly in Study 2, we observed that Brazilian participants tended to mention more events that directly or indirectly involved their country than did Chilean and Mexican students. This might be related to the socioeconomic status of the country in the superordinate group (Latin America). Brazil is marked by a historical, political and cultural distance from its neighbouring countries as a result of not having shared the same colonizer as other Latin American countries and having experienced a different independence process compared to Chile and Mexico (Onuki, Mouron, & Urdinez, 2016). In addition, there is a difference in terms of the official language of the countries (Portuguese in Brazil and Spanish in Chile and Mexico), as well as a dissimilar population composition and history, in which Brazil preferred to turn its face to Europe and its back to Latin America (Onuki et al., 2016).

Regarding the predominant themes of the events mentioned in both studies, those were mainly of military and political nature – wars, revolutions, violence, struggles against colonialism and the conquest of independence by the nations. In general, participants strongly highlighted the moments that marked the establishment of their nations and the struggle for independence. In Study 1, the Brazilians focused on the independence of Brazil and on the struggle against the Portuguese colonialism. The events associated with the achievement of independence were particularly relevant to the Angolan, Cape Verdean, Guinean, Mozambican and East Timorese participants. In Study 2, independence was considered the most important event by Brazilian, Chilean and Mexican participants.

One of the aspects in which the data in these countries differ is regarding the events related to discoveries, colonialism and decolonization. In Study 1, Brazilian participants reported ambivalent emotions regarding the Portuguese presence in the context of the national history: those who mentioned the “coming of the Portuguese royal family” to Brazil associated it with positive emotions, while those who cited the “Portuguese colonization” revealed negative emotions. The “discovery of Brazil” aroused ambivalent feelings on Brazilian participants, who indicated a mixture of positive and negative emotions (disappointment, anger, joy, admiration). The comparison of this pattern of results against that obtained from the analysis of the world history reveals that Brazilian participants expressed more negative emotions when mentioning the discoveries in the context of national history than in the context of world history. This pattern of results may result from the fact that the national context may



lead to a greater enablement of “recent criticisms” (Vale de Almeida, 2004) than the global context.

In Study 2, results also showed that there are still ambiguous and controversial understandings and evaluations concerning the discovery, conquest and colonization of Latin American countries. Despite recent debates criticizing the use of the term “discovery” to refer to the process of invasion and conquest that happened in the region, there was a positive evaluation of this term, especially among Brazilian participants. These debates occurred mainly during the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of “the discovery of America” in the year 1992 and, later on, with the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the “discovery of Brazil” in the year 2000 (Sá, Oliveira, & Prado, 2004). While some participants seemed to share a more positive representation regarding this event, others preferred to name it as “conquest” as a means of emphasising the negative impact it had on Latin American history, in line with the content of the aforementioned debates. However, this critical view regarding this event seemed to be more evident among Chilean and Mexican participants, since among Brazilian ones “conquest” was only cited four times and one of those was in reference to the “Spanish conquest” of some Latin American countries.

These results show that, probably, among Brazilian participants, it is still salient the idea that the Portuguese colonization was softer than the Spanish one, and that the Portuguese were more peaceful when compared with the Spanish colonizers, for example. This idea is deeply linked to the Luso-tropicalist perspective, derived from Freyre’s (1933/2003) propositions about miscegenation and racial democracy. Some of these principles were selectively appropriated during the dictatorship of Salazar, in Portugal. In this case, it was a way of legitimizing the colonial practices, besides promoting the exaltation of the Portuguese colonizing ability and capacity to establish an open and harmonious relationship with natives, thus reassuring the specificity of the Portuguese colonization (e.g., Vala, Lopes, & Lima, 2008; Valentim, 2011).

As for “colonization”, there seemed to be more consensus across the samples in both studies regarding its negative impact. In the African countries, for instance, there was a very negative evaluation of the “colonization”, but in the case of Cape Verde – an archipelago that was uninhabited until the arrival of the Portuguese – there was a positive evaluation of the “arrival” or of the “discovery” (according to the names chosen by the participants) (Cf. Cabecinhas & Évora, 2008; Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010; Cabecinhas & Nhaga, 2008; Mendes et al., 2010).

Accordingly, the events that marked the history that “binds” the Portuguese-speaking countries aroused some convergent but also some disparate emotions, in accordance with the role played during the colonial period. The analysis of these results shows how the memory of events is always impregnated with emotions that give each event a particular connotation. When comparing the emotions associated by the participants with their memories of the world history, similarities are observed in the emotional connotations of some events. The wars were seen with sadness, anger, shame, and frustration. The terrorist attacks (of which 9/11 stands out) led to anger, frustration, perplexity and fear<sup>45</sup>. The most significant divergences in the emotional connotation of the events of world history are precisely recorded in the events related to the discoveries, colonization, and decolonization, as previously mentioned. These findings are consistent with others found in the literature (Liu & Hilton, 2005), demonstrating that the emotional tone of an event depends on the social, political, geographic and economic affiliations of the groups involved. It also depends on how each group conceptualizes the role that it played in the respective event (*agent* vs. *victim*, for example) (Cabecinhas et al., 2006).

Consequently, the cluster of events linked to colonialism was important in the different samples. Overall, participants in African and Latin American countries focused on national independence and the negative effects of colonialism (Studies 1 and 2). The colonial liberation struggle emerged as a great narrative that contrasts with the results of the studies of Liu and colleagues (2005, 2009), which were conducted in all continents except Africa. Generally speaking, while Europeans tend to “forget” the negative effects of colonization when they think of world history, Africans tend to make those effects salient (Study 1). In both cases, forgetting or remembering serves functions of identity protection (Cabecinhas et al., 2011; Licata, Klein, & Gély, 2007; Licata et al., 2018).

Although some of these results in both studies might reflect hegemonic representations about history, which translate into images of the past that legitimize the current social order in the different countries in which the data were collected, they also clearly show expressions of social memory as a “field of dispute” and of symbolic struggle among groups. Memories about the “common past” that connect the Portuguese-speaking countries, in Study 1, are experienced with different emotional tones and, in some cases, ambivalent representations. For example, as far as the

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<sup>45</sup> The emotions raised by each of the events most cited by the national groups at the levels of world and national history are presented in more detail in other works (e.g., Cabecinhas et al., 2006).

Brazilian, Cape Verdean and Timorese participants are concerned, an ambivalent representation of the colonial past was observed that sways between the joy of “discovery” or “arrival” and the violence of the “occupation”.

When comparing these results obtained in former Portuguese colonies (Study 1) with previous results obtained in Portugal (e.g., Cabecinhas, 2006), globally the results demonstrate how challenging the construction of a common identity among Portuguese-speaking peoples is: the memories of the young Portuguese are aligned with the hegemonic representation of the history of Portugal as a country that “gave the world new worlds”, but are misaligned with the memories of the young people who inhabit these “new worlds”. As Sousa (2006) points out, “Lusophony is an extraordinarily difficult construction. It is a highly fragmented geolinguistic space, a feeling full of contradictions, a memory of a common past, a multiple culture and a tense shared history” (p. 9).

In this sense, Martins (2014) draws our attention to the need to remain vigilant and deconstruct the various misunderstandings that cross the concept of Lusophony, among which four stand out: 1) “the misunderstandings of a Portuguese centrality of Lusophony”; 2) “the misconceptions of reconstituting, in a postcolonial context, narratives of the old empire, nowadays with neo-colonial purposes, whether they are conscious or unconscious”; 3) “the misconceptions of reborn and revived Lusotropicalism, of a ‘sweet colonization’, which can nowadays both glorify the old colonial country, and exhort the present independent countries”; and 4) “the misconceptions of some postcolonial discourse, which is the narrative of a ‘resentment’ history” (pp. 25-26). As it was pointed out in earlier work, “undoing these misunderstandings without creating new reductive simplifications is undoubtedly a huge challenge for those who want to critically analyse cultural and identity dynamics in the Lusophone space” (Cabecinhas, 2015, p. 337). Such a task is absolutely crucial for the “decolonization” of thought.

Overall, in both studies, the cluster of events linked to the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities to all as well as references to colonialism, slavery and racism were more frequent (Study 1) than in previous studies (Cf. Liu et al., 2005, 2009). The data collected in the African Portuguese-speaking countries (Study 1) and in Latin American countries (Study 2) foregrounded the references to the struggle for liberation and the oppressive effects of colonialism (Cf. Brasil, 2017; Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2017; Cabecinhas & Évora, 2008; Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010; Cabecinhas

& Nhaga, 2008; Mendes et al., 2010). Events related to the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities to all were perceived as very positive in the scope of the World History Survey (Liu et al., 2012) – conducted around the world, with closed-ended questions and a predefined list of events – but the percentage of spontaneous mention to these events was much higher in African countries than in European countries. Therefore, globally, the data collected in Portugal replicated those of Liu and colleagues (2005, 2009), according to which world history is perceived as being shaped by the Western countries, highlighting the achievements (territorial, technological, etc.). However, the data collected in former Portuguese colonies (Study 1) and in Latin American countries (Study 2) revealed the struggle against colonialism, racism and other forms of oppression, which indicates that they clearly do not want to be “erased” from the World history (cf. Ngomane, 2012). This is probably the result of the socio-economic situation of these countries and their relative status in world relations.

Specifically regarding the events “slavery” and “abolition of slavery” in what concerns the Latin American history, it is worth mentioning that the salience of these events among Brazilians, in Study 2, but not in Chilean and Mexican samples, is consistent with the fact that, amongst these countries, Brazil was the one that had the longest history of slavery and was the last Latin American country to abolish slavery. However, in Study 1, the Brazilian sample highlighted the abolition of slavery as one of the most important events in national history. This difference of notoriety of the “abolition of slavery” in spontaneous nominations might be related with the different context – national or supranational history – but probably was also due to the fact that, in Study 1, most of the Brazilians who took part in the study identified themselves as “Black” (data were collected only in the Bahia State, the biggest “Black” state outside Africa), whereas, in Study 2, most of the Brazilian participants identified themselves as “White”. These results show that, despite the existence of several debates concerning slavery and other forms of exploitation resulting from colonial processes (e.g., Sá et al., 2004), there is still an urge for more discussion about the consequences of these processes in these countries, as it is the case of Brazil, where the black population is the one suffering the most from violence even in present times (e.g., Waiselfsz, 2016).

As previously mentioned, the historical memories of young people are sometimes aligned with the dominant version of national history in the public sphere of their respective countries, which might collide with family memories (e.g., Feijó &

Cabecinhas, 2009), with the version of history that is presented at school (e.g., Cabecinhas, Macedo, Jamal, & Sá, 2018), in the social media (e.g., Macedo, Martins, & Cabecinhas, 2011), in films and documentaries (e.g., Macedo, 2016), or with the dominant public memory in the country to which one emigrated, for example (e.g., Abadia, Cabecinhas, Macedo, & Cunha, 2018). In fact, several recent studies have demonstrated the persistent effects of the colonial process on the shaping of mentalities, social stereotypes and current intergroup relations (Bobowik, Valentim, & Licata, 2018; Cabecinhas, 2018; Macedo, 2016; Volpato & Licata, 2010).

The oppressive effects of colonialism in the long run are often underestimated, hence contributing to its maintenance. In Study 1, by highlighting a narrative of colonial liberation, African participants clearly demonstrated that they do not want to be “erased” from world history. As an African saying goes, *“until the lion tells their story, the predominant version will always be that of the hunter”* (in Meneses, 2008, p.76). The data collected seem to show that the story of the “lion” is starting to be heard, but in the borrowed words of Chimamanda Adichie, the general picture also makes clear “the danger of the single History” (2009), in which White/Western men play the active role (either as heroes or villains), while peoples of the Global South are mainly recognized as victims, crystallizing “old” social stereotypes, disseminated on a planetary scale by the “global” media, following structures inherited from colonization. This pattern becomes particular clear in the data about the historical figures (for information regarding the role of male and female historical figures in the studies on social representations of history, see, for example, Brasil and Cabecinhas, 2017; Cabecinhas, 2018).

In Study 2 a similar pattern was found: a central aspect of the history that these Latin American participants revealed was the struggle and the sense of overcoming, which unfolds itself through three fundamental moments: colonization, independences, and dictatorships (their beginning and their end, followed by a redemocratization process). So, it is a narrative that goes from exploitation to independence, from repression to freedom. This narrative, considering the extent of the region, its economic disintegration and its socio-cultural diversity (Canclini, 1999), brings together different countries because of the liberation from common oppressors: firstly, the colonizers; and then, the dictators. This is a way of strengthening the sense of belonging to these “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983/1991), not only in each country, but also within Latin America as a supranational group. While sharing crucial moments, this

narrative contributes to the construction of this supranational identity and the increase in its cohesion, not only by presenting common oppressors, but also by valuing the agency of individuals, their capacity for struggle and resistance, and their active role in past and future changes in the region.

Furthermore, as argued by Liu and Hilton (2005), “a group can use its collective wisdom to manage present crises through its memory of past ones, often with the aim of preventing history from repeating itself” (p. 549). Therefore, through analogies with past experiences, individuals relate new events to what they already know, to what is more familiar to them, hence anchoring (Moscovici, 1961/2004) these new events in those already experienced by their ingroup. This anchoring process was probably the reason why some Brazilian participants in Study 2 mentioned “democracies” and “end of dictatorships” among the most important events in Latin American history. At the time of data collection, the country was going through a political crisis<sup>46</sup> and the fear of a new dictatorship was represented in the media, which enhanced the cognitive salience of such events. Therefore, the importance given to these events by Brazilian participants might be a way of remembering what once happened in the country and highlighting the need to prevent this from happening again.

Our results reaffirm the need to address the continuities of colonial relations, which remain present in current times in the form of a coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005), of being (e.g., Maldonado-Torres, 2007) and knowing (Lander, 2000), and influence the way people with different backgrounds (e.g., previous colonizers *vs.* previously colonized people) interact. Hence, social psychological research cannot neglect the weight of historical colonial experiences in present-day intergroup relations. As synthesised by Volpato and Licata (2010):

The way this violent past is collectively remembered today is therefore a crucial factor for understanding contemporary instances of intergroup conflict, prejudice, stigmatization, and racism. Conversely, collective memories of the colonial times could also be instrumental in promoting intergroup reconciliation, mutual respect, and mutual recognition in and between contemporary societies (p. 5).

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<sup>46</sup> Data collection in Brazil (Study 2) took place during the beginning of the impeachment process of former President Dilma Rousseff, which started in December 2015 and was implemented in August 2016.

## 5. Final remarks

In this chapter, we revisited the results of studies conducted on social representations of world, national and supranational history in different countries. Some of these results contributed to fill the gap regarding comparative studies involving former Portuguese colonies in different continents (Africa, Asia and Latin America, Study 1), while others contributed to fill the gap concerning studies about social representations of supranational history (Study 2).

Despite its contributions, both studies had its limitations, namely the sizes of the samples and their characteristics. As previously mentioned, only young university students participated in this study, whose data cannot be extrapolated to the general population. Moreover, in the interpretation of the data that have been revisited here, we cannot forget that these are a reflection of a certain historical moment, having been collected in a given “time” and in a given “space”, which are fundamental elements in the structuring of collective memories. Hence, the events that were part of the media agenda at the time of data collection exerted a preponderant influence in some of the memories evoked. We once again emphasize that no prior list of events was given to the participants, so the probability of spontaneous evocation was greatly affected by the recency of events or by their media update at the time of ephemeris and celebrations.

Social representations of history may serve as a tool to segregate and reinforce stereotypes, by prioritizing the construction of conflicting stories, thereby functioning as a hindrance to dialogue among groups, compromising their future relationships. Nonetheless, social representations of history can also challenge negative stereotypes and the legitimacy of the current social order, fostering the reduction of intergroup conflicts (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Consequently, we cannot understand the dynamics of the present without taking into account the past and without listening to what the past means for the different groups and people, considering the plurality of cultures, knowledge and experiences. Therefore, the proper management of collective memories is a crucial element for the success of reconciliation processes and the possibility of a true dialogue with the “other”, from an understanding of the perspective of this “other” (Cabecinhas & Cunha, 2017; Sammut, 2010).

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